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# KING IN EXILE IN *AIRNE FÍNGEIN* (‘FÍNGEN’S VIGIL’): POWER AND PURSUIT IN EARLY IRISH LITERATURE

BY  
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The notions of power and exile were closely related in early Medieval Ireland. An early Irish tale *Airne Fíngéin* (further *AF*) illustrates just this relation and allows different approaches to the concepts of kingship and supernatural periphery of the inhabited world. The aim of this article is to revisit these concepts on the basis of a particular fragment from an Early Irish tale *Airne Fíngéin* where a connection between status and the supernatural can be perceived and analysed.

*Airne Fíngéin* (‘Fíngen’s Vigil’) is an early Irish tale devoted mainly to the description of wonders that followed the birth of Conn Cétchathach, the king of Tara. These wonders, or wonderful manifestations, are divided into several sections, and each of them constitutes an aetiological account similar to what we find in the *dindshenchas*. According to the text’s editor J. Vendryes the tale was composed sometime in the Old Irish period between the ninth and the tenth centuries. *AF* together with *Cath Maighe Léna*, *Baile Chuinn Chétchathaig* and other tales are usually perceived as parts of the so called cycle of Conn Cétchathach. The narrative of *AF* belonging to the kings’ cycle is characterised by a specific perception of the origins of royal power and its loss in the context of one particular myth. We are told how a local prince (*rígdomna*) from Munster, Fíngen mac Luchta, and a woman from the *sid* (from *Síd Cliach*, modern Knockainy, Co. Limerick) Rothnám met on Druim Fíngin in Eastern Munster (a ridge of hills between Fermoy and Dungarvan) on the night of Samain. The chronotope of meeting is quite common for any mythological plot. Here in *Airne Fíngéin* we have the unity of space and time, moreover a kind of mythological recurrence of this meeting is stated (*Boí ben shíde iarom oc aithige Fhinghein in cach Samain do grés*)<sup>1</sup>. Then Rothnám relates to Fíngen the tales of wonders that manifested themselves on the night of Conn’s birth. We are told in the metrical *dindshenchas* of Druim Fíngin, that Fíngen was promised the sovereignty of Ireland by Rothnám: that is why he later goes to exile when Rothnám tells him about the future High-king Conn and his descendants and thus betrays Fíngen as her chosen would-be king<sup>2</sup>. Concerning this

1. *Airne Fíngéin*, ed. by J. Vendryes (Dublin, 1953), p. 1. The text of *AF* from the ms. No 1223 (D IV 2) from the library of Royal Irish Academy was published by Annie M. Scarre in *Anecdota from Irish Manuscripts*, vol. 2 (Halle, Dublin, 1908), p. 1–10. See English translation of this version: T. P. Cross, A.C.L. Brown, ‘Fíngen’s Night-watch’, in *The Romanic Review* 9 (1918), p. 29–47. French translation by Ch.-J. Guyonvarc’h: *Textes mythologiques irlandais*, t. 1 (Rennes, 1980), p. 189–202.

2. *The Metrical Dindshenchas*, ed. by E. Gwynn, part IV (Dublin, 1924), p. 336–338.

night, she tells him, that she has fifty wonders (*búada*) to relate, though she mentions only twelve or so in the course of the tale. While the events of the tale take place, the same night Fíngen and Rothnám remain on the same hill, and it is only the woman's supernatural gift that allows them to be present in many places in Ireland at the same time. It looks as if her knowledge (*fius*) travels separately and allows her to perceive all "wonders and gifts in the royal forts of Ireland and among her fairy hosts" (*do decreaib 7 do búadaib i r-rígdúnaib Éirenn 7 in-a síth-chuiribh*)<sup>3</sup>. This motif has parallels in other early Irish texts, for example in the earliest Bran material, the poem *Imbaccaldam in druad Brain ocus inna banfhátho Fhebuil*<sup>4</sup>. Rothnám 'wheel + radiance' can be seen as an Irish counterpart of a Welsh female mythological character *Arianrhod* ('silver wheel') or of a Gaulish goddess of fortune (?) *\*Argantorota*. H. Birkhan considers Welsh *Arianrhod* as a literary personage to be a later development of a lunar goddess of the same circle as Mediterranean goddesses of fate, Tyche, Nemesis (daughter of Night) or Fortuna<sup>5</sup>. A lunar context of Rothnám, whom Fíngen meets at night, is also obvious enough. Later Rothnám appears in two variants (late Middle and early Modern Irish) of *Aided Chuinn* ('The death of Conn'), where she prophesies the death of Conn at the green of Tara while Conn is preparing the Feast of Tara. According to tradition, he was treacherously killed on the night of Samain<sup>6</sup>. Rothnám seems to have power over Conn's fate from his birth right to his death and in the later tales she plays a role similar to that of a folklore *bean sí* foretelling the death of a noble man.

Rothnám's locus *Síd Cliach* (otherwise known as *Áine Cliach*) also tells a lot about her significance both in otherworldly and in royal context. It is on *Síd Cliach* where the major tragic events happened that led to a battle of Mag Mucrima: a king from the *síd* *Eógabul*, father of Fer Fí, has been slain there and his daughter *Áine* ravished by *Aillil Ólum* (LL 37090-37105)<sup>7</sup>. These events also led to a great hostility of the otherworldly inhabitants of *Síd Cliach* towards the Munster dynasty and to a revenge performed by an otherworldly trickster Fer Fí. Although the events of *Cath Maige Mucrima* predate the birth of Conn according to a traditional chronology nevertheless they fit well into a pattern of treacherous behaviour of the fairy host from *Síd Cliach* and their ambiguous feelings towards the Munster dynasts. As Byrne points out, the mythological traditions of *Eóganachta* seem to centre on *Cnoc Áine* and the area to the south in county Limerick<sup>8</sup>. In the case of Fíngen mac Luchta it is not exactly *Eóganachta* dynasty but the Munster royal power as such which is challenged by a betrayal of the otherworldly authority from *Síd Cliach*.

3. Aine Fingean..., p. 1.

4. J. Carney, 'The earliest Bran material', *Latin script and letters AD 400-900*, ed. by J.J. O'Meara and B. Naumann (Leiden, 1976), p. 181. In the early Modern Irish version of *Oidheadh Chuinn Chéadchathaigh* Rothnám declares: *Is mise... ro innis gach ar hinniseadh do sgéalaibh geine Guinn i geéin boí ar farrthrach* ('It is I... who told all the tidings that were told of Conn's birth while he was in the womb') (C. Breatnach, *Patronage, Politics and Prose* (Maynooth, 1996), p. 96).

5. Birkhan, H. *Kelten. Versuch einer Gesamtdarstellung ihrer Kultur*. (Wien, 1997). S. 463.

6. M. Ní C. Dobbs, 'From the book of Fermoy', in *ZCP*, XX (1935), p. 163; C. Breatnach, *op. cit.*, p. 95.

7. *Cath Maige Mucrima*, ed. by M. O'Daly (Dublin, 1975), p.41.

8. F. J. Byrne, *Irish kings and high-kings* (London, 1987), p. 182.

We hardly know anything special even in mythological terms about Fíngen mac Luchta except what is stated in *Airne Fíngein* and in a poem from the *dindshenchas* from the Book of Leinster 198 b 2 (Druim Fíngin II<sup>9</sup>). He is called *rígdonna* (lit. 'material of a king') in the *dindshenchas*. The term *rígdonna* is known in a legal sense as indicating a person whose status is equal or nearly equal to that of a king, a presumptive royal heir from the *derbfine*<sup>10</sup>. Fíngen's brother is evidently a more successful character in early Irish tradition. According to *AF* it is Tigernach Tétbuillech (Tédbannach) mac Luchta, king of Eastern Munster (*rí cóicid*), the fifth which is named after him and his brother *cóiced Mac Luchta*. This Tigernach is said to have been a contemporary of such well-known kings of the fifth as Cú Roí, Ailill, Conchobar and Mes Gegra<sup>11</sup>. In other sources we encounter Eochu mac Luchta in his place.

Rothnám, who is termed *rigaí/n* ('queen'), promised to Fíngen a supreme royal power in Ireland. He was sure that he would rule Ireland (*co ngebad Banba*) but it does not happen<sup>12</sup>. The promises of Rothnám are hinting at the idea of a sacred marriage (cf. *nodailfed cu Fotla Fáil* 'he should meet Fotla of Fál'). Moreover, his recurrent encounters with the woman from the *sid* also suggest a sexual context. As Kim McCone has noticed, 'the king (*flaith[em]*) (or would-be king – G.B.) and the woman of sovereignty (*flaith[ius]*) mate and interact as respective representatives of human society and the divine powers manifested in nature or the cosmos as a whole'<sup>13</sup>. Nevertheless this member of the Munster royal dynasty was disappointed by Rothnám (she acts as a narrative index of failure or unsuitability on the part of a would-be king): the night described in *AF* is the night of a new High King's birth, the birth of Conn Cétchathach. The mythological situation described in our text may be called tragic (as it is true for many mythological situations). The tragic situation here is characterised by a certain opposition, a choice for the protagonist (Fíngen): either to lose himself (to die / to lose status) or to gain victory over the situation (while the martial victory appears to be impossible and only exile lets him free and noble). Fíngen has a minimum of free choice, and the latter decision leads him to exile. Fíngen's exile can be seen as a *neutraliser* of the above mentioned opposition, a neutraliser which only temporarily neutralises the opposition<sup>14</sup>.

Such an important character in Irish mythological and pseudohistorical tradition as Conn Cétchathach deserves a special study. In a few words we can say that besides his mythological importance as an ideal High King he might be seen in *Airne Fíngein*, as well as in some other tales of his cycle, as a paragon king of the Northern

9. *Metrical Dindshenchas*, ed. by E. Gwynn, Part IV. (Dublin, 1991), p. 336–338.

10. B. Jaski, *Early Irish Kingship and Succession* (Dublin, 2000), p. 237; F. J. Byrne, *Irish kings and high-kings* (London, 1987), p. 35–36.

11. *Tochmarc Étaíne*, ed. by O. Bergin, R. I. Best, in *Ériu*, XII (1938), p. 162.

12. *Metrical Dindshenchas*, ed. by E. Gwynn, Part IV..., p. 336.

13. K. McCone, *Pagan Past and Christian Present in Early Irish Literature* (Maynooth, 1990), p. 130.

14. A.M. Piatigorskiy, 'Nekotoriye obschiye zamechaniya o mifologii s tochki zreniya psikhologa', in *Trudy po znakovym sistemam II* (Tartu, 1965), pp. 40–41.

Half (*Leth Cuinn*) and an ancestor of the Uí Néill dynasty<sup>15</sup>. At the same time it is noteworthy that the would-be High King Fíngen represents a Southern Munster royal dynasty. In this way we encounter a conflict between the Northern and the Southern dynasties and halves of Ireland while the supernatural character, the woman from the *síd*, acts as a mediator. On the other hand Fíngen's brother (?) Eochu mac Luchta is mentioned in the Genealogies from Rawlinson B 502 (fo. 332) in the section *Genealach Fomoire* as a son of some Lugaid Lámfínd who is possibly the same character as Luchta Lámfínd, father of Lóegaire Lorc, the king of Leinster, according to *AF* (V, 110). It is remarkable that this Eochu is one-eyed, which is a feature of some Fomorians, and a defect which would usually disqualify a person for the kingship<sup>16</sup> (moreover in FM 1157 it is recorded that the head of Eochaid mac Luchta was found in that year: 'it was larger than a great cauldron: the largest goose would pass through the hole of his eye and through the hole of the spinal marrow' *Cend Eachdhach .i. Eochaidh mac Luchta, do fhaghbháil oc Fiondchoraidh, ba méidither coire mór é, no raghadh gédh as mó his dar toll a shúla, & dar toll a smera smentuine*). The supernatural character of Eochu is supported by genealogies where he had at least four ancestors who can be considered as different forms of the same pre-Christian god Lug: *Leo Lamfata, Lugair, Lugaid Lamfínd, Luchta*. As for Luchta himself in *Cath Cumair* he is called Lugh son of Lugaid Lamhfínn, high-king of Munster<sup>17</sup>. In both the Genealogies and in the *dindshenchas*, the pedigree of Eochu mac Luchta (which takes the place of Tigernach in some sources) is traced to Íth son of Bregon like the pedigree of the Érainn are traced to Lugaid, son of Íth<sup>18</sup>. Nevertheless I cannot establish obvious ties between the sons of Luchta and any of the Érainn *túatha* of Munster.

Fíngen became sorrowful after Rothnám had retold him a song sung by Cesarn the druid at Conn's birth. A bad mood, or despondency (*domenma*) took hold of him (already in the first paragraphs of our story Fíngen himself tries to avoid the 'bad spirit' of the cold night of Samain: *núm béra for drochmenmain* ('a bad spirit will not come into me'))<sup>19</sup>. Then Fíngen of his own free will went in exile leaving his own land and patrimony (*orbae*) to escape from the power of Conn and his descendants. Fíngen was wandering throughout Ireland (*imurchor sechnón Éirenn*) from one land and wilderness to another since Conn assumed the kingship of the whole Ireland<sup>20</sup>.

15. The earlier layer of Conn's tradition shows him as a king from a Leinster dynasty (J. Corhals, 'The rhymeless 'Leinster poems'', in *Celtica*, 21 (1990), p. 119), and both M. Dillon and D. Binchy agreed that an early Irish High-King could have been a prototype to the literary and mythological character of Conn Cétchathach (D.A. Binchy, 'Language and literature to 1169', in *A new history of Ireland*. Vol. I, ed. by D. Ó Cróinín (Oxford, 2005), p. 480).

16. *Metrical Dindshenchas*. Part III..., p. 338.

17. M. Ní C. Dobbs, *Side-lights on the Táin age and other studies* (Dundalk, 1917), pp. 43, 45. At the same time there is another Luchta in early Irish tradition, *Luchta sáer*, one of the *Túatha Dé Danann* in *Cath Maige Tuired* (§ 57, 102, 103, 122).

18. A. and B. Rees, *Celtic heritage* (New York, 1994), p. 135, 137; T. O'Rahilly, *Early Irish history and mythology* (Dublin, 1984), p. 82; *Anecdota from Irish manuscripts*, ed. O. J. Bergin and others, vol. I (Halle, 1907), p. 27.

19. *Airne Fíngein*..., p. 4.



It is important that a later tale from approximately the twelfth century *Buile Shuibhne* ('Suibhne's Frenzy') describes the mad king's exile from the world in similar words. Suibhne after having been horrified with miraculous visions sent by St. Ronan fled 'wandering and rushing for a long time throughout Ireland' (*Baoi fri ré chéin iarsin seachnóin Érenn ag tadhall & ag turrage*)<sup>21</sup>. Wandering from one glen to another Suibhne cannot find peace until he comes to a madmen's refuge in Glenn Bolcáin, which is very likely to be located in modern co. Kerry, in western Munster. I shall return to the specific character of this Munster refuge when discussing Fíngen's flight a bit later<sup>22</sup>.

One might suggest another pair of individuals, who function almost similarly in the ninth century tale *Aided Cuanach meic Cailchine*. This tale begins with an episode involving a well-known mythological character Mór Muman (supposedly the sovereignty goddess of Munster)<sup>23</sup> and a historical king of Munster Fíngen mac Áedo of the Éóganachta Chaisil († 619). In this fragment it is the supernatural woman Mór Muman who had suffered derangement (*fualang*) and after that travelled (*coroshir*) over Ireland taking a shape of 'Loathsome Lady'. She came afterwards as a shepherdess to Cashel where she met Fíngen and slept with him regaining her sense and her beauty<sup>24</sup>. Then with this new and ideal queen Fíngen's reign acquires certain qualities of a paragon kingship, as we read in the *Annals of Tigernach*: 'In Muma/ re linn Fíngen maic Áedha,/ rodbar lána a cuiledha,/ rodbar toirttigh a treba' ('Munster/ in the time of Fíngen mac Áedo,/ its store-houses were full,/ its homesteads were fruitful')<sup>25</sup>. After Fíngen's death Mór Muman went to Cathal mac Finguine, king of Glendomain, who became a new king of Munster. Therefore, the kingship of Munster went with her from Cashel to Glendomain and then to Áine. It is a remarkable fact that as it stands in the Book of Fermoy the tale *Aided Cuanach meic Cailchine* is followed by *Airne Fíngine*<sup>26</sup>. It is quite possible that the mythological Munster character Fíngen mac Luchta from *AF* could have been modelled on the historical seventh-century king Fíngen mac Áedo, especially when we consider his relations with a supernatural woman of power. I do not intend to say that Mór Muman and Rotuniam were identical, they obviously represent different characters with a different background, but their role as distributors of sovereignty seems to be similar.

Fíngen mac Luchta is never specifically called 'an exile' (*deorad*), although his position after leaving his territory does not differ at least legally from a *deorad*. He

20. There is a curious parallel to our story found in ancient Chinese chronicles. When the founder of the Chou dynasty, emperor Wu, has gained the supreme power, two princes from the local kingdom considered his reign illegal and fled to the mountains. Their honour did not let them eat the corn of Chou and they lived on wild grass and fruits (R. Caillois, *Le mythe et l'homme* (Paris, 1938), p. 105).

21. *Buile Shuibhne*... J. G. O'Keeffe (ed) (Dublin, 1931), p. 12.

22. Here we have to mention at least one more example of a famous king in exile in world literature: it is Oedipus the king, who also becomes a 'wanderer everywhere' after his voluntary exile driven by his repentance, his fate and his revealed knowledge.

23. P. Mac Cana, 'Theme of king and goddess in Irish literature', in *Études celtiques*, VII (1955-56), p. 90.

24. 'Mór of Munster and the tragic fate of Cuanu son of Cailchin', ed. by T. P. O'Nolan, in *PRIA*, 30 C (1912-13), p. 262-263.

25. 'The Annals of Tigernach', ed. by W. Stokes, in *RC*, XVII (1896), p. 174.

26. *Catalogue of Irish manuscripts in the Royal Irish Academy*, fasc. XXI-XXV, p. 3097.

becomes an outlaw of his own free will, and the usual course of action for an outlaw must have been to leave his own territory<sup>27</sup>. The extraordinary character of Fíngen's case as well as Suibhne's lies in the fact that he was not made an outlaw by anyone but simply fled from his home and avoided any law as well as the royal power of Conn. Fíngen's myth comes from the myth of the outlaw-hero, the younger brother whose initiation is conducted at night when he meets a magic helper. The same myth is known among Northern American Indians and according to it the outlaw-hero is taken by the supernatural beings into the Underworld<sup>28</sup>. A similar adventure, as one can see, is ascribed to Fíngen who is an alien to human society and his people but not to the supernatural beings.

Fíngen left an inhabited world with its social order and took refuge in uninhabited periphery. We should keep in mind that the protagonist's liminal and lonely position is stated at the outset when the story starts, and again it is even clearer in the *dindshenchas*: Fíngen and Rothnám 'used to part from their retinue' (*scartais ría slóg*) before meeting on Druim Fíngen<sup>29</sup>. Moreover his keeping of a vigil on Druim Fíngen in this remote and lonely place, his devotion to this duty, can be compared to the same kind of devotion and vigil of the famous Italic king of Nemi wood, who also serves as a priest of the lunar goddess Diana in the story mentioned by Strabo<sup>30</sup>. Nemi's king according to Strabo had to keep a vigil all night in fear of being killed by his would-be successor. His devotional vigil makes Fíngen a true king, a king of the sacred space in opposition to a terrestrial king, Conn Cétchathach. Thus from the very beginning of our plot, separated from his people, from his *túath*, from his social environment, the hero undertakes his journey to a periphery, which ends with a 'wandering' throughout Ireland and a final pursuit. Without any doubt one can not consider Fíngen (unlike Suibhne) to be an 'exile of God' (*deorad Dé*) (neither should one forget that *AF* is set in pre-Christian time, unlike Suibhne's story). Certain classes of mediaeval Irish tales are preoccupied with individuals, outsiders and the deviators from social norms and have obvious affinities with the hermit lyrics of the same period<sup>31</sup>. At the same time the hero's motivation towards flight into a 'desert' in *AF* differs greatly from what we observe in the practice of Western Christian: Fíngen's 'despondency' (*domenma*) brought him to a desert but for a Western Christian anchorite, – whether Continental or Insular – driven to the desert by spiritual passion it was 'despondency' (*acedia*) that presented the greatest danger. It means that the story of Fíngen's flight has no moral or Christian connotations and can rather be observed in a social and a mythological context.

After the short story of Fíngen's exile there is a chronological gap in the tale and it turns its attention to the time of Conn's reign. Conn stands on the hill of Uisnech in the centre of Ireland with his druid Corán. Then the following dialogue ensues between them:

27. F. Kelly, *A guide to early Irish law* (Dublin, 1998), p. 223.

28. D.M. Segal, 'Opyt strukturnogo opisaniya mifa', in *Trudy po znakovym systemam*, II (Tartu, 1965), p. 150.

29. *Metrical Dindshenchas*, Part IV..., p. 336.

30. Strabo V,3,12; J. G. Frazer. *The Golden Bough*. Part I, vol. 1 (London, 1922), p. 2, 8-11. Conn acts as a long awaited Fíngen's opponent in a manner similar to the Nemi's king's opponent.

31. P. Mac Cana, 'Conservation and innovation in early Celtic literature' in *Études celtiques*, 13 (1972), p. 103.

*In fil i n-Érinn, ar Conn, nech nád gíallann damsa ? – Ní fil acht óenfher, ol in druí. – Cía side ? ar Conn. – Ní ansa; Fingen mac Luchta, ol in druí; óro génairsi 7 óro gabais flaith, atá oc ingabail do gremma-sa 7 do rechta. – Cía baile i tá? ar Conn. – Atá i ndúthruaib Slébe Mis 7 Irluachra, ar in druí. – Ní fáicgebsa in foichne foghla sin i n-Érinn cen recht ríge fair, ol Conn. – Ní réid duit cétus, ar in druí. – Cid ón ? ar Conn. – Ní hansa, ar in draí; Atá ben tsídhe oca thínchosc, ar in druí. – Atá dono, ar Cond; fír mBoidb nDeirg for sídhchuiribh Muman frinsa, or Conn, coná biadh airbert am flaith uadhaibh. – Cía fil red láimh ? or in druí. – Atá frim láim Fer Fí mac Eóghabail, or Conn, .i. mac ingine Crimthainn Ní[a]d Nár 7 a Sáh Boidhb a athair. – Saig fair má conice, ol in druí.*

"Is there in Ireland," said Conn, "one who does not obey me?" "There is but one man," said the druid. "Who is he?" said Conn. "Not difficult; Fíngen son of Luchta," said the druid, "since the time that you were born and since you assumed sovereignty (*flaith*), he is avoiding your grip and your law (*do gremma-sa 7 do rechta*)." "In what place is he?" said Conn. "He is in the wilds of Slébe Mis and Irluachair," said the druid. "I shall not allow the pettiest act of trespass to occur in Ireland without king's law (*recht ríge*) covering it," said Conn. "That is not easy for you however," said the druid. "Why?" said Conn. "Not difficult," said the druid, "There is a woman from the *síd* who teaches him," said the druid. "I have the truth of Bodb Derg (*fír mBoidb nDeirg*) covering the hosts from the *síd* of Munster," said Conn, "so that there will be no attempt (*airbert*) on my sovereignty by them." "Who is beside you?" said the druid. "Fer Fí, son of Eógabail, is beside me, the son of the daughter of Crimthann, nephew of Nár, and her father is from Sídh Boidhb." "Seek him if you can," said the druid<sup>32</sup>.

32. Cf. *Airne Fíngéin*, ed. J. Vendryes (Dublin, 1953), pp. 23–24. My reading here is based largely on the D IV 2 (D) (fo 46b2) version and differs from Vendryes. Other manuscripts are: Book of Fermoy (A) (fo 26a1), Liber Flavus Fergusiorum (B) (fo 28r1), Book of Lismore (L) (fo 139b1). I supply my translation of the passage. Variae lectiones: *in fil*, an fil D; *inbhfil* L. *i n-Érinn*, *i nEirinn* D; *i ndEirinn* L; *ndEirinn* A; *nEirinn* B. *ar Conn* ar Cond D; om. AB. *nech*, om. D. *nád gíallann*, nat gialland A; nad gialland B; nad giallamh D; nat giallunn L. 3. *damsa*, dam D. *óenfher*, ænfear D; oeinfear L; oeinfear B. *ol*, ar D; or L; for B. *in*, in A. *druí*, drai D; drúi AB. 4. *side*, in fear sin D; es- L; sidé A. *ar*, for AB. *Conn*, Cond DAB. *ní ansa*, om. DL. *Fingen*, Finghin D. *ol*, ar D; or AB. *in druí*, sé A; se B. *óro . . . flaith* om. AB. *ro génairsi*, ro geinsim D; ata o ra genairsi L. 5. *gabais*, gabhuís L. *flaith*, flathius D. *atá*, om. L. *oc*, for AB; ag D. *ingabail*, ingab- L; ingabal B. *do gremma sa*, do ghrema D; do greama L. 7 *do rechta*, om. D; 7 do flathiusa A; 7 do lathiusasu B. *cia baile*, cá bail D; cia baili L. 6. *ar*, for LAB. *Conn*, Cond DAB. *atá* om. DL. *i n-dúthruaib*, itir dí sruth D; andithruaib L. *slébe*, sleib A; sleibí D; sl-i L. *Mis*, Mish B. 7 *irluachra* om. AB; 7 luachair D. *ar*, for AB. *in druí*, in drai D; an drui L. *fáicgebsa*, fluigiubsa D; fluiceabsa L. 7. *in foichne*, an foichin D; in fogne A; in fogne B. *foghla*, faghla L; foglas AB. *sin*, sinn A. *i n-Érinn*, om. LAB. *cen*, gan D. *recht ríge fair*, r[e]acht air D; recht righ fair L; reacht rig fair B. *ol Conn*, ar cond D; for conn A; for Cond B. *finis add. A*; finid imtechta fin fínsin add. B. *ní réid*, ní ba hurusa D. *duit*, dait L; duiti D. 8. *cétus*, on D. *ar*, for D. *druí*, drai D. *Cid*, cidh D. *ar*, for L. *Conn*, cond D. *Ní hansa ar in draí* om. L. 9. *tsídhe*, tsídhi D. *oca*, occa D. *ar*, for L. *in druí*, in drai D. *dono ar cond* om. L. *fír*, fíor L. *nDeirg*, om. L. 10. *for sídhchuiribh Muman*, om. D. or Conn, om. D. *coná biadh airbert am flaith uadhaibh*, co na bernabthar mo flathis uadh D. 11. *fil red láimh*, frut L. or, ar D. *in druí*, an drui L. *atá frim láim* om. L. ar cond add. D. *.i.* add. D. 12. *Eóghabail*, Eogob- L. or Conn om. D. *.i.*, om. L. *ingine*, inghine D. *Crimthainn*, Crimtain D. *Ní[a]d Nár*, .n.n. L. *sáh*, sigh D. *Boidhb*, Buidb L. 13. *athair*, ath- L. *Saig*, saidh D. *ma con-ice* om. D. *ol*, ar D.



We have to continue our discussion with the geographical location and background of the dialogue and of the mythological situation. After leaving the ridge of Druim Fíngen and the fifth of Munster with Fíngen and wandering around Ireland we find ourselves in the geographical and sacred centre of Ireland, which forms the turning point in the plots of many early Irish tales. In *Togail Bruidne Da Derga* for example Conaire, the king of Tara, observes Ireland from the hill of Uisnech when all supernatural forces are ready to expel him from the world (*bith*). Conaire, like Conn, appears in Uisnech ignorant and eager to obtain knowledge, he asks questions and his retinue answers. Although, unlike Conn, he sees almost total destruction of his power in Ireland from the hill, the reason given by Conaire's retinue is also connected with the violation of king's law (*is' in cháin ro mebaid and 'the law is violated there'*).<sup>33</sup> Uisnech, as the centre of Ireland, appears to be the most natural *locus* for a king to observe the carrying out of king's law. At the same time we have to remember that such a High King, controlling the whole Ireland from Tara or Uisnech, does not belong to any historical reality but rather to the Uí Néill's propaganda and even more to the Early Irish mythological *imago mundi*.

We meet Conn and his druid Corán again on the hill of Uisnech in the eighth century tale *Echtra Condlaí* (further EC, LU, fo.120b)<sup>34</sup>. Their dialogue seems to serve as a topos for tales connected with the Otherworld and women from the *síd* (Rothnám and Condla's anonymous mistress). In *Echtra Condlaí* Corán sings an incantation (*rochetal*) against a woman from the *síd* silencing her. It is important to notice two corresponding pairs in AF and EC – Fíngen, the outlaw, the *rígdama*, and Rothnám in the first text; Condla, the king's son fleeing to the Otherworld, and the woman from the *síd* in the other.

As for the abovementioned pairs I have to underline a feature noticed by many Celticists, namely, that the themes of the early Irish texts tend to repeat each other, either due to the frequent occurrence of standard situations within the dynamic of Irish society<sup>35</sup>, or because, by operating a principle of redundancy, repetition helps to make the structure more apparent<sup>36</sup>. This tendency also applies to the cast, who to a certain extent act the same roles over and over again<sup>37</sup>. In our material we encounter a transitional stage between pre-written and written culture. The former one was not engaged in multiplying texts but was constantly reproducing them, which were oral and given as if 'once and forever'. The link between these texts is a pattern of ritual or action, but this role may be played through all kinds of mnemonic devices like any natural or man-made phenomena – lakes, idols, trees, fortifications, hills and the

33. *Togail Bruidne Da Derga*, ed. by E. Knott (Dublin, 1975), p. 8.

34. K. McCone, *Echtrae Chonnlaí and the Beginnings of Vernacular Narrative Writing in Ireland: A Critical Edition with Introduction, Notes, Bibliography and Vocabulary* (Maynooth, 2000), p. 41, 121-122.

35. Cf. P. Bohanan, 'Concepts of time among the Tiv of Nigeria', in *Myth and Cosmos*, ed. J. Middleton (New York, 1967), p. 326-7.

36. Cf. C. Lévi-Strauss, 'The structural study of myth', in *Myth: a symposium*, ed. T.A. Sebeok (Bloomington and London, 1958), p. 105.

37. P. Ó Riain, 'Celtic mythology and religion', in *History and culture of the Celts*, ed. by K.-H. Schmidt (Heidelberg, 1986).

like<sup>38</sup>. They concentrate the memory of events in sacred time and types of behaviour vital for the community acting as a kind of 'gravitation centres'. Actions connected with these centres (such as Uisnech in our story) preserve in social memory certain behaviours, concepts, and emotions corresponding to particular situations.

It is not unusual for an early Irish tale such as *AF* to combine both aspects – supernatural and legal. Corán who acts as a knowledgeable person informs Conn that Fíngen has been avoiding the king's law (*recht*) since the king's birth and since Conn assumed sovereignty (*óro gabais flaith*) (these two events are taken as simultaneous in the mythological time of the tale). At the same time in *EC* Conn himself admits that he had never been engaged in such strife as he had experienced with the woman from the *síd* since he 'assumed sovereignty' (*ó gabsu flaith*). The start of Conn's reign is the starting point in both plots. The ideal *flaith[ius]* forms a special field any exclusion from<sup>39</sup> which seemed to be extraordinary if not supernatural. The most evident expression of *flaith[ius]* is 'the king's law' (*recht ríge*). As for Fíngen who had to avoid Conn's law it is important that he had excluded himself from the members of society who are also classed in early Irish law as *recht* 'law-abiding persons, ones of legal status'.<sup>39</sup> His position as an outlaw is not particularly unique for early Irish society but in the mythological time of the ideal reign of Conn the only one outlaw can break the whole structure of sovereignty just like the *díberga* during Conaire's reign. The single fault of the king's reign may destroy the *raison d'être* of sovereignty, namely the protection of the order founded on truth ('Bodb's truth' *fír mBoidb* in our case), or the supernatural support of human sovereignty<sup>40</sup>.

An ideal ruler such as Conn (who is described in *AF* as a *fírfhlaith* in *Audacht Morainn*)<sup>41</sup> seeks the fulfilment of his law on every last spot in Ireland. That is why we see the passage on the 'pettiest act of trespass' (*foichne foghla*), which cannot be left without the king's law on it. In contrast, this curious passage was interpreted in a different way by M. Dillon who, basing his interpretation on the readings *foichin foghla* from D IV 2 and *foichne faghla* from the Book of Lismore, had proposed to read in *foithne fogla* 'that tinder of damage (or plundering)'<sup>42</sup> which makes much more sense than J. Vendryes' reading (*fogne foglas* 'the very green young blade of corn'). The reading *foichne foghla* seems to be plausible because a final poem from *AF* attributed to Eochaid Éces exalts Conn's ideal reign (*ríghi*) 'without damage (or plundering)' (*gen fhogail*). In early Irish laws *fogal* meant 'a hurt, damage or trespass' perpetrated by an individual on the person or the property of another<sup>43</sup>, whereas in the tales *fogal* usually means 'plundering, raid or attack'. One might be less sure in

38. Y. M. Lotman, *Universe of the Mind* (London; New York, 1990), p. 247. Earlier P. Mac Cana had expressed the same view on early insular Celtic literature. He thought of thematic cores continually reproducing themselves fleshed out in the narrative accidents appropriate to a given period or locality, tribe or dynasty (P. Mac Cana, 'Conservation and innovation in early Celtic literature', in *Études celtiques*, 13 (1972), p. 115.

39. F. Kelly, *op. cit.*, p. 105.

40. Cf. G. Dumézil, *The destiny of a king* (Chicago and London, 1973), p. 111, 112.

41. *Airne Fíngéin*..., p. 21; *Audacht Morainn*, ed. F. Kelly (Dublin, 1976), p. 18.

42. *Airne Fíngéin* ..., p. 61.

43. *DIL*, p. 318 (*fogal*).

what sense – legal individual or literary – to read the term *fogal*. Fíngen as an outlaw performs his own *fogal* ‘trespass or damage’, but on the other hand his marginal position makes him a potential rebel just like Conaire’s foster-brothers. It is important that a similar expression is found in the Middle Irish composition *Cóir Anmann*, where the nickname of Conn’s grandfather Túathal Techtmar is explained: *Nó ar theachtadh cháich cocoitchinn dósom, ar nír’ fhagaibh-sium in foich fágghlas a n-Erinn gin rechtghí flatha*, H. 3.18, P. 576<sup>a</sup> (*oir nír fhaccaib sium in foichnir fogla in Erinn gan tectadh flatha*, BB 254<sup>b</sup>36; *air nír’ fhacaib som inad foich fhocla in Erind cen techtad flatha re lind*, Lec. 176<sup>r</sup>7) (‘Or from the jurisdiction over every one in general which he exercised; for he did not leave the pettiest act of damage (?) without the ruler’s law (jurisdiction)’)<sup>44</sup>. W. Stokes takes *foichne* to be a diminutive of *foiche* ‘act, deed’, so that we do not have to reconstruct M. Dillon’s *foithne*. In that way the formula appears to be rather typical for a description of an ideal king from the line of Uí Neill ancestors.

Let us return to the last place of Fíngen’s refuge: after wandering throughout Ireland Fíngen appears in ‘the wilds (*dáthruaib*) of Slíab Mis and Irluachair’. Slíab Mis in this context is the mountain ridge Slieve Mish in Co. Kerry between Tralee Bay and Dingle Bay (there is also Slíab Mis in Ulster (Slemish, Co. Antrim)), the area of Irluachair lies also in modern Co. Kerry close to Killarney (Temair Luachra, one of traditional centres of Munster, was the residence of Eochu mac Luchta according to *Cath Ruis na Ríg*)<sup>45</sup>. Mad Suibhne, another famous king in exile, as I have mentioned already, found his refuge in Glenn Bolcáin, which was located by G. Mac Eoin in Co. Kerry close to Slieve Mish (to the east from Ventry)<sup>46</sup>. In *Buile Shuibhne* it is described as the place where all the madmen of Ireland used to come after a year of their madness (*gealtacht*)<sup>47</sup>. On the one hand it seems strange to connect Fíngen with madmen (*geilt*): his exile seems to be a proud and rational step in order to stay independent from the northern High King; on the other hand, his state of *domenma* ‘lit. bad spirit’ implies some sort of a mental instability.

As we see Fíngen, the Munster *rígdamna*, finds his refuge in the remote periphery of Ireland, but still in his native *coiced*, in Munster. The most southern fifth of Ireland has its unique features reflected both in the literature and in the historical development of this region. I shall not discuss in detail this special character of Munster in early Irish literature as an abode of *áes síde* (Banba on Slíab Mis, Bodb and Nár Túathcháech in Sídh Boidb, Áine in Cnoc Áine) and other supernatural heroes (Cú Rói, Mug Ruith etc.). What is important for us here is that we can locate and organise our plot in a Munster triangle formed by Sídh Clíach (Rothniam’s home) – Druim Fíngen – Slíab Mis which contrasts with the other two places decisive for AF plot, – Tara and Uisnech, – and embodying an ideal supreme royal sovereignty (not to mention all the topography of the *dindshenchas* type stories in AF).

44. *Irische Texte*, ed. by W. Stokes and E. Windisch. 3. Serie. 2. Heft (Leipzig, 1897), S. 332. On the other hand one can cite a phrase from the later version of *Cath Maighe Tuireadh* (p. 404): *dona fuichneadhhuibh forghlasa Fomhórrdha atad ag milleadh Ereann*.

45. See: T. O’Rahilly, *op. cit.*, p. 177.

46. G. Mac Eoin, ‘Glenn Bolcain agus Gleann na nGealt’, in *Béaloideas*. Iml. 30 (1962).

47. *Buile Shuibhne*...., p. 12.

The major conflict resolved in the passage discussed is the conflict between the woman from the *síd* and Conn. It implies that Rothnám obviously did not leave Fíngen after having declared to him the birth of a new king of Tara. Corán, the druid, fearing the power of *ben shíde* (which is a clear reminiscence of *EC*), reminded his king that this woman taught Fíngen (*oca thincosc*). It means that the protagonist does not lose support from the supernatural side; he hardly can be called a failed king as for example Conaire who 'was exiled from the world by spectres' (*rt insin loingsite stábrai din bith*)<sup>48</sup>. Fíngen's liminality together with this supernatural support makes him not only an outlaw but also a potential king, independent and dangerous. In reply Conn appeals, as to his last chance, to a certain unique legal term 'the truth of Bodb' (*fír mBoidb*)<sup>49</sup> connecting both spheres of sovereignty and the supernatural. The term *fír* 'truth' has both a legal and a mystic sense; it is a 'guaranty', an 'assurance' based on the superior power<sup>50</sup>. There was expressed a view that we do not have any good English equivalent of the Old Irish *fír*, which can be described as the legal concept that makes truth and justice dependant on each other<sup>51</sup>. Although the full meaning of *fír mBoidb* is not clear enough, here it can not be taken as an equivalent of *fír flathe-mon* 'king's justice', which played essentially a different role in early Irish law. We can compare this archaic concept (*fír mBoidb*) involving one Irish pagan god (war-god?) with the Indian tradition where the gods of the Veda are fed on truth, born of truth, and act by means of truth. The term *fír mBoidb* seems to be even more relevant for this Indo-Celtic comparanda first noticed by M. Dillon.

Bodb, mentioned here, forms another centre of power, the supernatural 'south pole' of our tale. Bodb Derg, son of the Dagda, is the king of the *síde* of Munster and in a later early Modern Irish tale *Altrom tige dá medar* he is called the over-king of the *Túatha Dé Danann* in Ireland<sup>52</sup>. His residence is in *Síd ar Femen* (alias *Síd Boidb*), which is on Slievenamon in modern Co. Tipperary. Bodb Derg is shown as a warrior-king of the *áes síde* of Munster in the tale *De chophur in dá muccida*: where he won a battle against four Irish kings and was consequently feared by the Connachta. Bodb addresses Ochall, the king of the Connachta's *síde*, on the battlefield: "*Imma-fuissethar dún*" ("Let us protect one another"); later *imma-fuissithiur dóib* ("they (Bodb and Ochall – G.B.) protected one another")<sup>53</sup>. This kind of war-like protection seems to be characteristic of Bodb, a fact that allowed H. Birkhan to consider that Bodb Derg was originally the Irish war-god, a male counterpart of the better known war-goddess Bodb (Badb)<sup>54</sup>. Thus Conn's reign seems to be supported by the *áes síde* (at least in Munster), just like the reign of Conaire Mór in *TBDD*. There is no prohibition on their part from bringing Fíngen under the king's power. Conn seeks

48. *TBDD*, § 26

49. It has to be Bodb (o, m.) Derg and not the goddess Bodb (Badb) (ā, f.) gen. of which would be *Bodbae*.

50. *Airne Fíngéin*..., p. 61.

51. A. Ahlqvist, "Paragraph 16 of *Audacht Morainn*: linguistic theory and philological evidence", in *Historical linguistics and philology*, ed. by J. Fisiak (Berlin, 1990), p. 1.

52. 'Altrom tige dá medar', ed. L. Duncan, *Ériu*, XI, p. 184.

53. *De chophur in dá muccida*, ed. by U. Roeder (Innsbruck, 1979). S. 50, 52.

54. H. Birkhan, *op.cit.*, p. 685.



help from the *áes síde* in his conflict with Rothnám unlike in *EC*, where Corán, the druid was the only king's helper (notwithstanding how allegorically we should take the latter tale).

When the above quoted dialogue between Conn and his druid ends there follows a logical gap in the narrative when the protagonist returns from his exile and submits to Conn's power, which becomes possible only after supernatural interference (namely by the *áes síde*). Conn's messenger to Fíngen Fer Fí (a mediator between human sovereignty and the world of the *áes síde*) is a well-known mythological character also having a Munster origin, more precisely from Síd Cliach<sup>55</sup> (the native hill of Rothnám). Fer Fí makes his first appearance in *AF* already at the night of Conn's birth at the Feast of Tara to honour the future High King. Fer Fí's grandfather is located in the fragment in Bodb Derg's dwelling Síd Boidb while Fer Fí can be seen here as a mere tool of 'Bodb's truth'.

*AF* and the *dindshenchas* discussed represent both the origin and the loss of king's sovereignty as deeply dependent on some source of supernatural knowledge (Rothnám and Corán in this instance). Moreover if one takes some kind of 'sacred marriage' between a king and a powerful woman as an inauguration rite or at least a rite performed in order to reach power, still this *ἱερός γάμος* is a function of knowledge. (It implies knowledge given by such a woman.) The status of any distinguished (or extraordinary) character in Early Irish literature, to a great extent, depends upon supernatural and otherworldly beings in the image of the pre-Christian past drawn by authors of the early Christian period. But it is by Fate, which is even more powerful than the *áes síde* that Fíngen is driven to his exile, to his liminality, and to his unstable existence out of reach of the supreme king's power.

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55. *Cath Maige Mucrama*, ed. by. M. O Daly (Dublin, 1975), p.41. His grandfather Crimthann Nía Náir is said to be from Síd Boidb (alias Síd Femen, the *síd* of Bodb Derg) according to *AF*.



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